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ABSTRACT

Originally general education was a reaction against over-specialization and academic compartmentalization arising from the specialized degree structure--a reaction which stressed the need for a common experience for all students and emphasized the heritage of Western civilization. Early authors on the topic sought to define general education and liberal arts, and to assess its outcomes and the various approaches to instruction. Later authors were more concerned with its failures and predicted its forthcoming demise. Recent attempts to revive general education have tried to redefine the core of common experience which all students should share, and to introduce a focus on the present and future. While recognizing the diversity among students, this redefinition establishes universal goals--students must be able to think analytically and critically, to solve problems, and to communicate through a variety of media. The general education teacher, in achieving these goals, must try a variety of instructional approaches, recognizing the problems inherent in repeatedly using a method that appeals to only one group or that stresses only one cognitive style. A state-of-the-art look at general education should consider the areas of study that now comprise the field, the structure of learning within it, content-related tools of technology, the commitment of community colleges, and the new community college students and their objectives and educational choices. (AYC)

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GENERAL EDUCATION --"DREAM OF COHERENCE"

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Submitted to the President of Montgomery College, Maryland,
for discussion at a forum held on May 22, 1978,
on the subject of
"Future Purposes, Content, and Formats
for the
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"If we are to do justice to individual differences, if we are to provide suitable education for each of the young men and women who crowd into our colleges and universities, then we must cultivate diversity in our higher educational system to correspond to the diversity of the clientele. There is no other way to handle within one system the enormously disparate human capacities, levels of preparedness and motivations which flow into our colleges and universities.

"But we cannot hope to create or to maintain such diversity unless we honor the various aspects of that diversity. Each of the different kinds of institutions has a significant part to play in creating the total pattern, and each should be allowed to play its role with honor and recognition.

"We do not want all institutions to be alike. We want institutions to develop their individualities and to keep those individualities. None must be ashamed of its distinctive features so long as it is doing something that contributes importantly to the total pattern, and so long as it is striving for excellence in performance. The highly selective, small liberal arts college should not be afraid to remain small. The large urban institution should not be ashamed that it is large. The technical institute should not be apologetic about being a technical institute. Each institution should pride itself on the role that it has chosen to play and on the special contribution which it brings to the total pattern of American higher education.

"Such diversity is the only possible answer to the fact of individual differences in ability and aspirations. And furthermore, it is the only means of achieving quality within a framework of quantity. For we must not forget the primacy of our concern for excellence. We must have diversity, but we must also expect that every institution which makes up that diversity will be striving, in its own way, for excellence. This may require a new way of thinking about excellence in higher education--a conception that would be applicable in terms of the objectives of the institution. As things now stand, the word excellence is all too often reserved for the dozen or two dozen institutions which stand at the very zenith of our higher education in terms of faculty distinction, selectivity of students and difficulty of curriculum. In these terms it is simply impossible to speak of a junior college, for example, as excellent. Yet sensible men can easily conceive of excellence in a junior college.

"The traditionalist might say, 'Of course! Let Princeton create a junior college and one would have an institution of unquestionable ex cellence!' That may be correct, but it may also lead us down precisely the wrong path. If Princeton Junior College were excellent, it might not be excellent in the most important way that a community college can be excellent. It might simply be

a truncated version of Princeton. A comparably meaningless result would be achieved if General Motors tried to add to its line of low-priced cars by marketing the front half of a Cadillac.

"We shall have to be more flexible than that in our conception of excellence. We must develop a point of view that permits each kind of institution to achieve excellence in terms of its own objectives."

John Gardner, Excellence (pp. 83-84)

Order is as Contagious as chaos. Order is inherent in the whole process and thus it is not enough to teach reading and writing and counting. Somehow, the rigid division of labor allows the life substance to fall between the chairs. Order is the prerequisite to democracy. There can be no democracy if there is not order. Unless and until this generation is resurrected from this moral abyss and a new moral tone is established for the nation, all of our resources will be poured into a giant bucket that has a hole in it. What does it really matter if the doors of opportunity swing wide open, but you are too drunk to stagger through? What does it really matter if you have a new book or an old book, if you open neither? So, it is important that we teach intellect. Probably more important that we teach priorities, for if your priorities are in order, we will pursue intellect, moral strength, and stamina. If we have access to intellectual options but our priorities are confused, we teach intellect.

Jesse Jackson, President
Operation PUSH
Chicago, March 18, 1977

General Education -- "Dream of Coherence"

The subject of general education, its future purposes, content, and formats as related to the community college appeared at first blush to be so formidable that to deal with it within a short space of time would amount to intellectual, if not emotional, self-destruction.

You will recall the Tenniel illustration of Alice in Wonderland swimming about in a pool of tears which she wept when she was nine feet high, after having allowed her curiosity to overcome her self-discipline, which led her to eat the cake that said, "Eat me" (she was a literate child). " 'I wish I hadn't cried so much!' said Alice as she swam about, trying to find her way out. 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose by being drowned in my own tears. That will be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer today!' " A mouse swam by. "'Would it be of any use, now,' thought Alice, 'to speak to this mouse? Everything is so out of the way down here, that I should think very likely it can talk; at any rate there's no harm in trying.' So she began; 'O mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O mouse' (Alice thought this might be the right way of speaking to a mouse; she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother's Latin grammar, 'A mouse--of a mouse--to a mouse--a mouse--O mouse!') The mouse looked at her rather inquisitively, and seemed to her to wink with one of its little eyes, but it said nothing.

'Perhaps it doesn't understand English,' thought Alice; 'I daresay it's a French Mouse come over with William the Conquerer.' (For all her knowledge

of history, Alice had no very clear notion how long ago anything had happened.) So she began again: 'Où est ma chatte?' which was the first lesson in her French lesson-book. The mouse gave a sudden leap out of the water, and seemed to quiver all over with fright. 'Oh I beg your pardon!' cried Alice hastily, 'I quite forgot you didn't like cats.'"

Having gotten the mouse to speak to her at all, Alice and the mouse were finally reconciled and swam to shore together. "It was high time to go for the pool was getting quite crowded with the birds and animals that had fallen into it: there was a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet, and several other curious creatures. Alice led the way, and the whole party swam to shore."

As one swims about in the pool of literature on general education, the shore grows ever more distant. It is quite possible to feel drowned not only in words and ideas, but also in tears. Only recently general education was declared "a disaster area"! However, Alice, having in all probability had a general education, used what knowledge she had, analyzed the problem, tried a few alternatives within the limits of her communication abilities, and finally got to shore. I shall follow her example.

Helpful in getting to shore have been conversations with colleagues in my own multi-campus college as well as in visits to other community colleges, with community college and state level administrators, and with a variety of people encountered at conferences devoted to some of the problems community college people everywhere seem to be facing. I can report that most of them are for something called general education, sometimes confused with liberal arts, but many seem to think its future is extremely cloudy.

What is obviously the next step is to do what we are doing and what Alice and her friends did. "They had a consultation about this, and after a few minutes it seemed quite natural to Alice to find herself talking familiarly with them as if she had known them all her life." For a description of the nature of that consultation, which is not unlike some educational meetings, your homework is to go away and read Chapter III of Alice's adventures, and make your own analogies. (History teachers, brace yourselves!)

Meanwhile, back at a town called Cambridge, we suddenly discover there has been a consultation over the last three years which has resulted, most topically, in the publication of Harvard's core curriculum report, not yet debated by the Harvard faculty. Some community college people immediately exclaimed, "Ha! If Harvard does it, we must do it. Let's look to Harvard as a model." Of course, the reality is that Harvard has an elite, highly selective student body of what is called traditional students. In current educational circles, this means full-time students attending courses aimed at a four-year academic degree. We are talking about community colleges which are universal access institutions with large numbers of what are now called non-traditional students. Non-traditional students are part-time students or non-degree credit students or both. However, both institutions theoretically deal with students as people, and are concerned with student performance in terms of their own objectives. There is no harm in looking at the report to see what we may find that students everywhere have in common. A cat can look at a king. Especially in a democracy.

With the report we seem to have come full circle after thirty years and the upheavals of the 60's. It was the 1945 Harvard report on general education, that initially became a kind of manual for general education in higher education, a sourcebook from which others borrowed, modified, and adapted, or with which they disagreed. More on that subject later.

At this outset you are reminded that the viewpoint expressed here is that of a faculty member exposed over a long period of time to what teaching and learning in a community college seem to be about. It is affected by what the mission of the community college appears to be as against the mission of other forms of higher education. These missions are now being defined or re-defined increasingly, in a time of dwindling monies, by outside fiscal and governing factors and agencies. Any viewpoint must consider the nature of our target population. Students come from all walks of life, all ethnic backgrounds, all sexes, all ages, in probably one of the most heterogeneous populations conceivable in any institutions of higher learning. We have been the Statue of Liberty of higher education, accepting all comers to our shores. Until now we have enjoyed a kind of Golden Age of great waves of students who come because we offered an open door, an equal opportunity, and universal access. In some places there is now a new wave of immigrants who really are immigrants and refugees, from non-European cultures with which we are not as familiar as we are with the old waves. These new and international students from the Middle East and the Orient bring with them change, a different set of mores, values, backgrounds, religions, a whole new world of cultural variations, as well as new problems.

Open and universal access to serve each community has been consistent with the nature of American democracy, granting equal rights and equal opportunity for life, liberty, and whatever it takes to pursue happiness within the limits of a person's capabilities and the rights of others. Robert M. Hutchins in describing Education for Freedom, inadvertently describes as well the purpose of the community college. "It is a basic right of the individual that his mind should be developed as far as it proves itself capable of expansion. It is also a basic necessity of the community that this should be done. The ideal is that everybody should have a basic education. Opportunities to provide this will vary with circumstances. Within the resources of the community, nobody should be excluded. It should not be assumed that anybody is incapable." (p. xiii)

This purpose is not likely to change in the immediate or even long-range future. It is within the framework of this purpose that I should like to look at the origins of the idea of general education and the present state of the art, and to try to extract from these ideas whatever common kinds of learning we can talk about for everybody. The nature of the community college student population seems to be the single most important factor in the future of general education in the community college.

Look Backward; Looking Forward

Originally the idea of general education was a reaction against over-specialization and academic compartmentalization arising from the development of the specialized degree structure. It arose from the need for common experience for any or all students. Today we find that what began

as what the Carnegie Commission in 1977 called a "dream of coherence" has from all reports little left except a bare shadow of its beginnings.

Early in the twentieth century general education was a response to concerns about the free elective system because students could go through four years of college together and get the same degree without having had a common experience. Columbia University, after the first World War, and the Universities of Chicago and Minnesota instituted integrated learning into a general education context.

The Bible of general education in the 40's was the Report of the Harvard Committee of 1945, entitled, General Education in a Free Society. And we must admit reading it is heady and exciting stuff. The ideas expressed are not really so remote from those that appear in many a community college catalog. They boil down to "train a man in a vocation but educate a man as a human being and a citizen." The classic cadence of the language, thirty years later, is moving, and worth attending to as an experience in itself.

The term "general education" was used "to indicate that part of a student's whole education which looks first of all to his life as a responsible human being and citizen; while the term, special education, indicates that part which looks to the student's competence in some occupation. These two sides of life are not entirely separable, and it would be false to imagine education for the one as quite distinct from education for the other ..." (pp. 51-52)

A solution to the problem of "how to save general education and its values within a system where specialism is necessary" was to make the aim

of education "to prepare an individual to become an expert both in some particular vocation or art and in the general art of the free man and the citizen. Thus the two kinds of education once given separately to different social classes must be given together to all alike." (p. 54) "The aim of general education may be defined as that of providing the broad critical sense by which to recognize competence in any field. William James said that an educated person knows a good man when he sees one." "General education is especially required in a democracy where the public elects its leaders and officials; the ordinary citizen must be discerning enough so that he will not be deceived by appearances and will elect the candidate who is wise in his field." (p. 54) "We should envisage general education as an organic whole whose parts join in expounding a ruling idea and in serving a common aim." "The problem of general education is one of combining fixity of aim with diversity of application." The abilities to "be sought above all others in every part of it" (p. 64) "are: to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgments, to discriminate among values." Elements in effective thinking include logical ability to draw sound conclusions from premises, to discern patterns of relationships --"on the one hand to analyze a problem into its component elements, and on the other to recombine these, often by the use of imaginative insight, so as to reach a solution." (p. 65) They include imagination in a combination of logical, relational, and imaginative, phases that "correspond roughly to the three divisions of learning, the natural sciences, the social studies, and the humanities, respectively." (p. 67) "Communication -- the ability to express oneself so as to be understood by

others -- is obviously inseparable from effective thinking." (p. 68) It includes moral qualities as well, such as candor. It includes listening, conversation, and writing. "The making of relevant judgments involves the ability of the student to bring to bear the whole range of ideas upon the area of experience...applying them to facts.". (pp. 69-70) "Discrimination among values involves choice...the power to distinguish values truly known from values received only from opinion...values of character...like fair play, courage, self-control, the impulse of beneficence and humanity; intellectual values like the love of truth and the respect for the intellectual enterprise in all its forms;...aesthetic values, like good taste and the appreciation of beauty." (pp. 71, 72) The writers pointed out that this description was not meant to identify "intelligence with the qualities of the so-called intellectual type -- with bookishness and skill in the manipulation of concepts." It was meant to apply to the development of the whole man, "his emotions, his drives, and his will" and that "the fruit of education is intelligence in action." "The aim is mastery of life; and since living is an art, wisdom is the indispensable means to this end." (pp. 74-75)

The kinds of course work which resulted emphasized the heritage of Western civilization. Proposed courses were (a) Western Thought and Institutions (2) Great Texts of Literature; (c) Principles and Methods of Physical Sciences; (4) Principles and Methods of Biological Sciences, and (4) three upper-level general education courses.

In 1947, the President's Commission on Higher Education stated its goals for general education, focusing on the total development of each

individual and pointing to the need to design education for the individual to: --

a. deepen his sense of personal integrity

b. stimulate participation in civic affairs as an active and informed citizen

c. accept personal responsibility for fostering international understanding

d. understand our natural environment and the effect on human welfare

e. grasp and express ideas effectively

f. attain a satisfactory emotional and social adjustment

g. safeguard personal and community health

h. appreciate cultural activities as a means to richer living

i. prepare intelligently for a satisfying family life

j. discover an appropriate and satisfying life work

k. develop the ability to think critically and constructively

The kinds of coursework which resulted from this list are often referred to as functional courses because their goals are to prepare students for functioning in dealing with the immediate problems of life.

In still another approach to general education, the term liberal education was used to describe the outcomes of the application of the mind to a prescribed content. Robert Maynard Hutchins represented a group which included VanDoren, Foerster, and Adler. As advocates of what is known as "the great books" approach to general education, the proponents of this approach see the study of the greatest books of time past up to the present as a means by which students will become acquainted with the processes and results of man's best thinking and then be able to apply

the resultant learning to current and future problems of day-to-day living. Hutchins says that the ideal university would produce a man "who has achieved wisdom through the use of his reason and through experience"... and that the faculty of this university "do not regard education as a substitute for experience, but only as preparation for it. They believe, however, that a trained mind is essential to the comprehension of experience and that the object of the specialized institution called the educational system is to equip the people in this way to deal with the problems that confront them." (The University of Utopia, p. 69) "What the prospective research worker needs is a liberal education, special preparation in the subject in which he plans to carry on research, and practice in research under supervision. The reason he needs a liberal education is that he is a man and a citizen, and the major premise of this book is that every man and every free citizen needs liberal education." (p. 35)..."a liberal education, the education appropriate to free men." (p. 58)..."a man must go on learning all his life,...he can do so if he is a man, and...if he does not do so, he will cease to be one." (p. 59) The means to the end of training the mind lies in the students' sharing the common experience of reading great books and then, using the Socratic method of questioning, of discussing their substance and the processes by which they are organized and communicated.

Interestingly enough, Hutchins, a pioneer advocate of the two-year college, which he at one time called the last hope for basic liberal education, thought of learning as a life-long experience for adults, today a major community college emphasis.

It was Mortimer Adler who, with Hutchins, conceived of the Great Books Foundation which for over a quarter of a century has promoted a volunteer adult education organization based on Adler's premise that young people are trainable whereas adults are educable -- having had seasoned experience to bring to education. His How to Read a Book, a classic volume on analytical reading techniques, is a timeless source book for adult education.

In 1952, B. Lamar Johnson published General Education in Action, in which he listed the aims of the general program for the junior colleges of California. (p. 2)

> "Exercising the privileges and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.
>
> Developing a set of sound moral and spiritual values by which he guides his life.
>
> Expressing his thoughts clearly in speaking and writing, and in reading and listening with understanding.
>
> Using the basic mathematical and mechanical skills necessary in everyday life.
>
> Using methods of critical thinking for the solution of problems and for the discrimination among values.
>
> Understanding his cultural heritage so that he may gain a perspective of his time and place in the world.
>
> Understanding his interaction with his biological and physical environment so that he may adjust to and improve that environment.
>
> Maintaining good mental and physical health for himself, his family, and his community.
>
> Developing a balanced personal and social adjustment.
>
> Sharing in the developing of a satisfactory home and family life.
>
> Achieving a satisfactory vocational adjustment.
>
> Taking part in some form of satisfying creative activity and in appreciating the creative activities of others."

The instructional approach used by some institutions recommends a sampling from many fields of knowledge -- called the liberal arts approach to general education. The usual pattern is a course in English composition and at least one course in science, history and the social studies, the natural sciences, and the humanities. The assumption is that from a sampling of knowledge and of methods of work in a variety of areas students will develop understandings and insights and then apply them to the problems and decisions of contemporary life. This is the path which appears to have been taken by most senior and junior colleges at the time of Johnson's study. The California community colleges of that period, which he studied in detail, appeared to be representative of community colleges in general.

In a recent study in 1975 of the same California community colleges, A.James Hudson and Ralph B. Smith, search for an answer to the question, "Does General Education Have a Future?" They report that "for all practical purposes, general education has been rendered an ineffective part of the student's program." "It appears that general education is 'up for grabs' and that virtually any course is acceptable in some way. The effect of this is that there are few effectively organized programs in general education, and present requirements fail to meet the stated goals found in community college catalogs." "Among the developments was the increasing reliance on the practice of utilizing appropriate subject matter in the student's major to satisfy general education, e.g., business English for business majors." "Everyone, yet no one, is responsible for general education. It is little wonder that general education is what it is -- a collection of courses that are unrelated, irrelevant, lacking in meaning,

failing to meet the stated goals of general education." Johnson's study in 1952 (p. 173) confirmed the indifference of the community colleges to the development of comprehensive general education programs in the communication skills. The present study reaffirms this conclusion about general education in the community college. Hudson and Smith quote Monroe, "the enthusiasm for general education which prevailed in the 1940's and 1950's has waned. A definite reaction has set in since 1960. The pendulum is swinging back to the selection of courses from several fields of study." (Profiles of the Community College, 1972, p. 76) "In 1970, general education appears to be in the final stages of dissolution, a condition which institutions seem willing to have happen. There is today little commitment on the part of community colleges to the concept of general education. Perhaps there never was."

In 1973 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in Priorities for Action: Final Report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education reviewed and re-affirmed the recommendation of the Presidential Commission of 1947, known as the Zook report. (p. 133) They point out that "education should contribute to the quality of life." "All too often, liberal education had been splintered by increased specialization. The commission recommended that colleges and universities adopt a unified concept of general education. General education would contribute to critical thinking, vocational pursuits, family life, an enjoyment of culture, improved health, emotional and social adjustment, an understanding and expression of ideas, and scientific discovery for modern life. With such education, students would understand better the interdependence of

nations, would participate more often in solving social problems, and would assume enlarged personal and civic responsibility. To accomplish this, colleges and universities would have to discard the distinctions between general and vocational education and to incorporate extracurricular activities in a unified concept of total education." (Italics mine)

The Zook report was the same one that called for "universal equal access to postsecondary education", now epitomized in the community college.

One of the priorities the Commission called for was that higher education "search constantly for the means to improve the educational experience of students -- through more choice among more diverse options, a renovated program of general education, a more constructive environment for developmental growth, more opportunities to mix work and service, among many other proposals. They should be more concerned with better teaching, with more effective curricula, and with all the other dimensions of academic quality -- seeking more optimal modes of curricular organization and instructional presentation." (p. 89)

That report was made five years ago. Higher education seems to have moved with glacial swiftness, but the question of general education is now being reconsidered by a number of institutions. The chief motivating force seems to be the almost universal reaction to complaints about the level of communication and computation skills among entering students. (Reported in an editorial in Science, March 31, 1978, Volume 199, Number 4336.)

It is small wonder that the 1977 commentary of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in Missions of the College Curriculum,

calls general education "an idea in distress." They say "no curricular concept is as central to the endeavors of the American college as general education, and none is so exasperatingly beyond the reach of general consensus and understanding." (p. 164) Knowledge has so expanded that the liberal arts colleges are in difficulty. "...In its comprehensive totality the knowledge suitable for a liberal education is now beyond the grasp of these institutions." "About the best that any college can do is introduce its students to historic benchmarks and great ideas or provide as broad an array of learning as its resources allow so that students can select their own liberalizing education and provide the advanced skills and background its graduates need for continuing to learn throughout their lives." General education then becomes a "mediating influence" that requires the student to make choices from the supermarket of courses and programs an institution may offer, in the hope of getting "some knowledge of the ideas and culture that were once themes of the total liberal arts college." (p. 164) "General education is defined as general only in the sense that it is required of most or all students." (p. 9) Liberal education is defined as "consisting of a curriculum more or less in its entirety organized around the cultural heritage of civilization and thus concentrating heavily on the humanities." The three parts of general education in this view are first, advanced learning skills courses such as language and mathematical skills which are valuable in any kind of further study. The second breadth or distributive courses are designed to present the students with a sample of the major streams of human thought which

represent different "ways of knowing" and those different approaches to the aspects of life the Greeks called the good, the true, the beautiful. And the third concerns the students exposure to understand man's changing environment and the place of the individual within it. (p. 9)

On December 19, 1977, a report on the panel's views in The Chronicle of Higher Education made the news in a story by Malcolm Scully headed, "General Education: 'a Disaster Area'" with the subheading "Carnegie panel seeks reforms in curriculum to produce coherent undergraduate programs." The panel is quoted. "We have been through a period when knowledge was fragmented, but dreams of coherence survived...We seem to be entering a period of new attempts at synthesis." It advises that institutions now have two choices. "One is to follow the direction of current trends and restructure American higher education as a totally open system with a common beginning, many places to stop in or out, but with almost no provision for...learning experiences common to all students in the college..." "The other ... is to reassert the value of undergraduate education not only as preparation for the student embarking on a career or advanced education, but also as something that makes a positive, intended difference in the lives of those who are exposed to it and, through them, in society as well." The latter is their choice. "...the curriculum of the future should be less the result of pressures and more the consequences of sustained thought...higher education should demonstrate that it can think about what is needed as well as respond to what is demanded."

The Foundation makes some tough statements. If colleges cannot provide a coherent general education, they should consider eliminating general education entirely. "They should not use their incapacity to provide a well-defined and coherent general education program as an excuse to require students to fill out their graduation requirements with additional electives or concentration"..."Instead, they should question the necessity of requiring students to spend the time in college that meeting ineffective general education requirements now frequently demands." A commitment to general education requires an institution to address three specific problems. (1) Many introductory courses are taught as if they were "intended for majors in a field". (2) "There is a neglect of the advanced learning skills" in composition and computation. (3) "Integrative courses or a series of courses aimed at broad understanding are of exceptional importance, but they are hard to teach. We have succumbed to what Bertrand Russell once called 'the current trend toward fiercer specialisms.'" The Foundation notes that institutions need to become explicit about their role in preparing students for occupations and professions and to develop opportunities for part-time work and work-study programs. They need to cultivate moral and ethical values. They are, nevertheless, faced by one "almost insurmountable obstacle". General education is "not highly regarded by discipline-oriented faculty members." Those who participate in general education courses outside their own department "are sometimes at a disadvantage when they are considered for promotion by their department colleagues."

In an article "Chaos in the Curriculum" in the Washington Post of October 30, 1977, Ernest L. Boyer, former Chancellor of the State University of New York, and now U.S. Commissioner of Education, points out that there is nothing wrong with a rich and varied curriculum, but that "educational institutions are supposed to have some significant purposes of their own, some goals beyond creating catalogue listings that read like mental menus. The colleges' sense of purpose was seriously shaken by the campus turmoil of the 1960's and early 1970's, and the problem has been compounded by financial fears on many campuses today. But unless educators are willing to tell the emerging generation that they have little idea about what matters anymore, colleges and universities must seek to redefine the threads of common experience that bind us together. To do this, campuses would have to recreate some common core curriculum." An historian, he defines as essential a required course in Western civilization, in communications, in the meaning of vocation, in institutions, and a consideration of prospects for the future, all aiming at the capacity to understand and criticize.

This brings us back full circle to Harvard again, this time with the new curriculum. The text of the proposed guidelines is published in The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 6, 1978. Its objectives are stated in terms of how an educated person must perform and the curriculum is theoretically built to support this performance.

1. An educated person must be able to think and write clearly and effectively.

The Core Curriculum reaffirms the importance of an expository writing program and seeks to improve the present program by combining instruction in writing with substantive core courses.

2. An educated person should have a critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain knowlege and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves. Specifically, he or she should have an informed acquaintance with the aesthetic and intellectual experience of literature and the arts; with history as a mode of understanding present problems and the processes of human affairs; with the concepts and analytic techniques of modern social science; with philosophical analysis, especially as it relates to the moral dilemmas of modern men and women; and with the mathematical and experimental methods of the physical and biological sciences.

Our goal is to encourage a critical appreciation of and informed acquaintance with the major approaches to knowledge, not in abstract but in substantive terms, so that students have an understanding of what kinds of knowledge exist in certain important areas, how such knowledge is acquired, how it is deployed, and what it might mean to them personally.

We seek in other word, to have students acquire basic literacy in major forms of intellectual discourse.

To this end we are proposing requirements within several areas.

A Literature and the Arts requirement will acquaint students with important literary and artistic achievements and will aim to develop a critical understanding of how man gives artistic expression to his experience of the world.

A History requirement will focus on major aspects of the present world viewed in historical perspective and will attempt to lead students to an understanding of the complexity of human interaction in specific situations in the past.

A requirement in Social and Philosophical Analysis will introduce the central concepts and ideas of social science and moral and political philosophy and will develop students' analytic skills in addressing fundamental aspects of individual and social life in contemporary society.

Finally, a Science and Mathematics requirement will acquaint students with basic principles of the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences and with science as a way of looking at man and the world. In addition, a new standard of competence in mathematics will ensure familiarity with quantitative reasoning and the mastery of basic algebraic manipulations. These will underpin further study throughout the curriculum.

3. An educated American, in the last third of this century, cannot be provincial in the sense of being ignorant of other cultures and other times. It is no longer possible to conduct our lives without reference to the wider world within which we live. A crucial difference between the educated and the uneducated is the extent to which one's life experience is viewed in wider contexts.

A Foreign Languages and Cultures requirement in the Proposed Core is specifically designed to expand the student's range of cultural experience and to provide fresh perspectives on his or her own cultural assumptions and traditions. This aim may be achieved through core courses in Literature and the Arts, History, or Social Analysis or in special courses in Foreign Languages and Cultures. The intention here is not merely to avoid an exclusive focus on Western traditions, but to expose students to the essential and distinctive features of major alien cultures, whether Western or non-Western.

4. An educated person is expected to have some understanding of, and experience in thinking about, moral and ethical problems. It may well be that the most significant quality in educated persons is the informed judgment which enables them to make discriminating moral choices.

Obviously, moral and ethical problems will appear in the study of literature, art, history, and social analysis. However, questions of choice and value are at the heart of the required work in Philosophical Analysis.

5. Finally, an educated individual should have achieved depth in some field of knowledge. Cumulative learning is an effective way to develop a studnet's powers of reasoning and analysis, and for our undergraduates this is the principal role of concentrations.

The Core Curriculum assumes that concentration and nonconcentration requiremeuts have different functions in undergraduate education. Critical to all concentrations is some degree of cumulation or progression, that is, a sequence of study that builds upon earlier accomplishment within the concentration and helps to develop a level of maturity and proficiency which is the goal of concentration. In contrast, the Core Curriculum--the basic set of nonconcentration requirements--states the minimum standard of broad intellectual experience. Yet it does not simply rest on the assertion that breadth as such, or <u>any</u> form of distribution, is valuable for its own sake; it is directive and specific, in the areas stated above.

Some Universals

Given a heterogeneous population, with its assortment of characteristics and goals, what do they have in common whether they are vocational-occupational, liberal arts, certificate or degree students, part-timers or full-timers, young students seeking goals for the future, working students attending part-time, older students who have more leisure? What kinds of behaviors are we talking about? Are there some basic concerns, qualities, or learning which they, as people, have in common with the other more traditional students? Can we distill these many factors into a basic few -- either in skills or in knowledge (knowledge being not information but organized information that has been thought about)? We recognize that the students all live on the same planet. They must, first of all, survive, which means preserving a sound mind in a sound body. They all live with other people in a societal setting and have personal and interpersonal needs. They are all coping in one way or another with the manifold aspects of daily life in a highly technological setting. They would not be in school if they did not, in some conscious or unconscious way, want something in the future that will be better than they now have, or that will make their lives more interesting, useful, or give them more meaning. All are citizens of a country -- but in the global context of resources, economy, industrialization and communications technology, they are also now citizens of the world, of what McLuhan has called an electronic "global village".

Out of all these considerations, and in the opinion of almost everyone to whom I talked about what common behaviors, what "general education" would

apply to each student, there emerge some basic kinds of learning. They, it is the consensus, must be able to think in some organized or reflective way. They must be able to communicate and understand communication coming to them through a multitude of media.

In comparing some of the ways that general education has been defined in the cycle described earlier, common universal qualities emerge which could apply to every student regardless of the kind of institution in which he is studying. Distilled to their basic essence, the general education objectives all require the student, at bottom, to think analytically and critically. They require the student to understand the methods of gaining knowledge, and the multiple forms of communication. They require the student to solve problems. If imagination can be taught -- and there are those who say it can be -- it would be as a part of problem-solving, which is usually where it is used and needed. If the student thinks analytically, it would seem to follow that he would develop his own flexibility and be able to adjust to changes of all kinds. Changing places, changing jobs, rapid change through technology are all parts of the American way of life. If he cannot carry away with him all the information he has received, he should be able to use the carry-over mental skills and apply them to any life situation. We teach people carry-over sports, why not lifetime carry-over thinking?

Robert Hutchins is reported at one time to have said, "The purpose of a university is not to prepare the student for something; it's to prepare him for anything."

What kinds of behavior could be expected from a student who had,

though a general education, been given opportunities to develop these abilities -- which are really life-skills necessary to coping with whatever comes along? The student should be able to demonstrate that he can

-- think analytically, reflectively, and critically about the nature of his/her self and the universe

-- determine what it means to communicate clearly and effectively; he will himself communicate (speaking, listening, reading, writing); he will be <u>verbally</u> literate

observe and see critically or imaginatively; understand nonverbal communication; he will be <u>visually</u> literate

understand and use basic computational or quantitative communication and its tools, including the uses of such tools as statistics

use skillfully the communication of others by knowing how to gain access to new subjects or ideas through the use of information systems, resource centers and libraries

-- solve problems and find or imagine alternatives

-- define, analyze, see relationships and synthesize in the performance of his work or in lifetime situations

-- arrive at useful, critical, or wise judgments.

The activities described are <u>processes within</u> the student. They are not subject matter as we normally think of subject matter. In order to achieve these behaviors, the student must of course be able first to survive by coping with his life and society -- not only in the present but in the future. He must live and eat and therefore learn to earn money by getting, and assuming the responsibilities of, some kind of vocation. The processes we have described are <u>applied</u> to the content of what he is learning, the knowledge being absorbed, the resource materials upon which processes act, either in cognitive or affective ways. A suitable slogan might be "Think. Communicate. Cope." Students early on recognize the importance of the process. In its simplest form this awareness is expressed when they comment about their teachers: "<u>That</u> teacher really makes you <u>think</u>!"

From these life-skills, properly exercised, can flow or develop other qualities or capabilities -- the development of values and moral standards, interaction with the biological and physical environment, family life, health, exercise of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. All require thinking analytically first, no matter what the task, at home, in a job, in school, in society.Analytical thinking precedes or is simultaneous with appreciation, whether of the arts or sciences. A sense of time past, present, future, and a sense of place arise from thinking.

There seems to be little reason why the sharpening of these abilities, the raising of consciousness or awareness about them could not be practiced anywhere for any subject matter in a truly interdisciplinary and integrated sense. This practice should lie at the base of the goal of general education for each and for all.

Considering Approach and Strategy

For general education a teacher whose objective is to teach intellectual skills and use the subject matter of the course as the means to that end, the major instructional tasks are to determine first the kind of approach that will be taken to the subject matter. Will it be based around a major problem, theme, human concern? Common concepts or theories in the life sciences? Common applications of such a methodology as the scientific method as used in the sciences, the humanities, or history, so that the focus is on the interdisciplinary use of the scientific method rather than on the facts of subject matter? Second, is the sequence or arrangement of the

subject matter, and finally, the kinds of strategies to use in order to achieve practice in the universal skills involved in general education. How will mental practice and subject matter mesh? The task is to keep an eye on such objectives as analysis, problem-solving, critical thinking and adapt teaching methodologies in such a way that course subject/content becomes a means of getting students to practice analysis, problem-solving, or critical thinking. Just as it is not fair to test students on what they have not been taught, it is not fair to blame the students for not appearing to be adept at the desired skills -- of whatever kind -- unless we give them practice within some kind of orderly structure which they understand. We cannot blame them for having attitudes or acting in ways contrary to our ideas of what is wise if we have not encouraged or fostered judgment through practice. This is part of our responsibility to their future.

The consciousness of the difference in learning styles and how people learn is a path to the avoidance of frustration. Listening, for example, is only one part of the spectrum of the learning process. Not all people learn best, or retain for very long, by listening. Even good listeners do not retain information for very great lengths of time. That's why people take notes. Therefore if a teacher predominantly uses an oral lecture method, the information is going "in one ear and out the other" and the lecture may be passing over large numbers of nontraditional students. There are other ways of conveying information and the repeated use of a method which appeals to only one group or stresses only one style may be likened to the Dodo in Alice's pool of tears.

In a speech delivered before the Remedial/Development Education National Conference of 1977, Jesse Jackson pointed up the need for some awareness of strategies when he discussed the influence of television on minority students. His audience was a group of college teachers and presumably he was talking about college students. "Television has power far beyond the comprehension of most educators, because, at best you are reading or listening to the easy music on FM100. But I am here to tell you, on the other end of the dial, that the people whose minds you are competing for, you are losing. We must first get the students' attention, and then deal with attendance and then attitude and then achievement. We do not even have their attention; that is why they do not attend, and that is why we do not affect their attitudes, and that is why they do not achieve." (Proceedings, March 1977, p. 42)

The Scope of Present and Future Problem-Solving

A second observation we can make about the movement of the aims of general education past to present seems to be that they move from the need to understand our cultural heritage and the past by knowing what it was, to accenting and understanding this past in terms of increasingly great and pressing problems, present and future. We are constantly adding new dimensions in the content of what we are doing or learning in the present which will affect the future. According to the futurists, the scientific and social commentators, the future is bound up with survival, not only for Americans but for everybody on the planet. We are now determining that future.

Proponents of general education are no longer talking only about teaching the duties of the good citizen in a nation. They are talking about being citizens of the world, not only in the human Socratic sense but in a material, economic, and survival sense as well. Our perspectives and prospects have become global rather than national. We have a super-everything -- from supermarkets and superjets to a super-industrial society. Our global dependence each day expands. We can no longer live with a provincial view, economically or culturally. Science and technology have thrust us through communication and transportation not only into the world but into space. Instant communication provides information -- and an intrusion into our inner lives in a way we have not had to cope with before. It is not the problem-solving or the coping skills which are different. It is the scale of the problem and the coping which is different, as well as where general education fits into the scale. In a book called An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect (1974), Robert L. Heilbroner asks the question, "Is there hope for man?" and he points out that to meet the challenges of the future without paying a fearful price, the answer must be: "No, there is no such hope." The challenges he lists are three -- population growth, the prospect of war with the advent of nuclear weapons potentially capable of "irreparable damage" to the earth, and finally the danger of encroaching on the environment beyond its ability to support the demands made on it, a problem in an entirely different category from the other two questions. He points out that "nuclear attack may be indefinitely avoided; population growth may be stabilized; but ultimately there is an absolute limit to the ability of the earth to support

or tolerate the process of industrial activity, and there is reason to believe that we are now moving toward that limit very rapidly." (p. 47) Parts of the last problem are the availability of the resources necessary to sustain industrial output, which in the developed world has been doubling every ten years. There is the question of how rapidly new technologies of extraction or refining can be developed, or anti-pollution technologies can suppress their ecological disturbances. The limit on industrial growth therefore depends in the end on such things as the tolerance of the ecosphere for the absorption of heat. All industrial production -- including the extraction of resources -- uses energy. All energy is involved with the emission of heat. "The limit on industrial growth therefore depends in the end on the tolerance of the ecosphere for the absorption of heat." (p. 50)

Heilbroner's blueprint for the post-industrial society points to major changes in the human prospect, human societal attitudes and point of view, including a new view of production and consumption "stressing parsimonious, not prodigal, attitudes," the reduction of the role of science linked with industrial application, the waning of the work ethic, and the waxing of acceptance of communal organized and ordained roles instead of the struggle for individual achievement.

Business and economics, the physical, biological, and social sciences, and especially the psychology of stress for new social role players, are all involved in interdisciplinary ways in the search for solutions, adaptation. To learn to cope with interdisciplinary problems, students need more interdisciplinary studies stressing the relationship of multi elements and their synthesis, rather than narrow specialization of content which is not related to real life problems or which assumes students will all be specialists.

It is unclear that the "future shock" Toffler spoke about in 1970 has been much accelerated by Heilbroner's gloomy 1974, and that now the shock is no longer future. It is present shock and our new future shock will probably be some kind of super shock. Consider population growth; pollution and toxification in all of its present forms; inflation coupled with abundance and scarcity simultaneously; the mountains of garbage and waste products which would make Dante's inferno seem more like the "other place"; the growth of national and international crime and terrorism; the emerging Third World; the state of moral values, especially of corruption in high places; the changes in marriage, divorce, and the family; the increase in stress as a problem of the super-industrial society; depression as a major disease afflicting millions of Americans each year; an increasingly silent spring. What solutions are there and what kinds of general education can be planned to help people to cope with and solve such problems? Education for planning, rather than using is needed.

For today's students the magnitude of their global problems, as well as their personal problems, and their anxieties about them, are enlarged and made more instantaneous and anxious with the changing sophistication of the electronic media whose messages assail us wherever we move, from the noisy big city to the quietest pastoral countryside. There is no escape from the bombarding of the senses night and day. If it is not enough that the media surround us with messages pre-selected by someone else, we can now make our own. In the Washington area the last pre-Christmas sales of TV home cameras and all the concommitant hardware cleaned out the stores three weeks before the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Make your own home video programs by recording them yourself or use a Betamax and record off the air, in your absence, your favorite

television program. You will be comforted to know that now for $395 you can buy a "true pocket TV" with a two-inch screen. You can carry it with you in purse or pocket. "How else can you keep in touch?" says the ad.

In the electronic "global village" of constant stimuli, of constant opinion-making, in the massage of all of the senses by the media, how do you teach students to make the kind of wise judgments that arise from analytical reflective thinking? There is the aim of achieving through general education a verbal literacy but there is also a need for visual literacy which teaches how to read visual and oral messages. Educating for and in the communication process of the present and for the future must include the ways of decoding such messages, and knowing what judgments to make about them. One wise judgment might be to know when to turn the "off" switch.

We have all heard the statistics about how beginning college students come with 16,000 hours of television in their heads, 12,000 of them devoted to some form of violence. Average daily family viewing is estimated as between six and seven hours a day. While we verbally deplore the content of television programs, we seldom discuss our responsibility in how it got that way. What are and will be our choices in affecting the quality of the medium which affects the quality of our lives? That television can be a great educational force we know from the fine programs on public broadcasting -- few people would argue with the value of The Adams Chronicles or The Ascent of Man. But that is not where we put our money. We are all viewers and receivers. These are present and future questions of responsibility to be evaluated in the context of everyone's general education.

The problems with communications technology are in other ways global. While we are here reading or in consultation, the satellites are tirelessly

working, sending messages, mapping, generating enough information to keep us busy on earth interpreting for years. And the technology exists that makes it possible to beam messages, without reference to a local station, into every city, village, or kraal that has a receiver. Who controls the technology controls the message and the mind. How will we teach the analytical, judgmental skills to cope with, not only the technology itself, but the choice of the messages? What is the national image we are projecting all over the world as we send our television fare out to the receivers everywhere? What economic dissatisfactions are we causing by picturing our material wealth to others with slimmer resources? What values do we project? What values do we have? These are general education interdisciplinary problems linked to the subject matter of philosophers, social scientists, media specialists, and instructional technologists. Students need practice in analysis of such problems if they are to cope with them. Again, they should see the relationships of these questions to the total environment of their lives. Interdisciplinary approaches can give practice in problem-solving and seeing relationships.

Last summer in Finland in a small city beyond the Arctic circle I saw a tragically depressing documentary on the unresolved problems of aging in a crime-ridden American city. In a small inn even farther north the glorious wilderness silence was broken briefly with the devasting globally significant news of the death and worship of an American youth hero -- Elvis. Both messages were reflecting our values.

There seems little doubt then, that in addition to thinking and writing clearly and effectively, a common element in most aims of general education --

and the first for an educated man from the Harvard perspective -- there should be added thinking and seeing clearly and effectively, for any educated person in the present and in the future. Both verbal and visual skills express our value structure. General education ought to address itself to this point and to the relationship of our values to our philosophies.

Whereas such social problems as aging in the "Greying of America" may be national and personal, we all seem to acknowledge that they are among those that general education for the future should include. More basically, perhaps what we need as individuals is to prepare ourselves for change. How do you teach people to cope with change? Already the community college is involved in change in terms of a person's aging. There needs to be an extension to include change of all kinds, including adaptation to the effects of the kinds of future shock Heilbroner discusses, of environmental and social change on a national or global scale. Change accelerates daily. Stress and change can be linked in manifold ways. Adjustment to change in our rites of passage has much support but how will we adjust to the future of increased stress as change accelerates in our physical environment? In education we should be able to call in the social scientists, the psychologists, the business specialists. Again, in an interdisciplinary way all of these areas of study or application are involved in teaching how to cope with this multitude of big and little problems -- communicated in anxious news-making voices, by radio, TV, or newspapers. The problems are there even though all a person wants to do for himself is to survive and brush his teeth and take care of his health and family and earn his bread.

Areas of Study in General Education

The problems emerging from the present into the tomorrow of the future require, again, analytical and critical thinking, problem-solving skills, communication and coping. The nature of the questions which they raise is not narrow or parochial. A suggested logical approach might seem to be to organize areas of study which would be interdisciplinary as a focus for the general education of all students. Kinds of topics which suggest themselves are futures studies and future planning viewed and discussed as related to history and government past and present. Another area would be centered around futures planning and social problems and their relationship to the individual, including the nature and practice of social justice. Another would be present and future personal and inter-personal relationships in fa mily life or on the job; the psychology, biology and chemistry of coping with stress and change, and causes and effects, including the physical education related to this topic and its role in relaxing and recreating body and soul. Another would be understanding the physical environment in the context of the industrial and post-industrial society -- through physics, natural science, geography and geology, economics and business; this area would have to be supported by mathematics. Another large area would deal with the creative aspects of human nature -- art in terms not only of the present but of the future; for example, its new materials, its new forms of expression, quite apart from but also as an extension of, the traditional forms and materials such as paint and canvas, marble or bronze. There are now new mediums and new metals, the

spin-offs of the space age. Music, the dance, the performing arts are seen from the present and in the emerging future. An integral part of this area is the student as creator himself or herself. The literature and philosophies of the past and their vision of the future are studied as an expression of man's creative spirit both in form and substance, but also as an expression of his coping capacities or warnings about effects if he fails to cope. One area would deal with cultural studies involving how other people live and work, their customs and their language, their arts and their ethos -- including the culture of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the OPEC nations, and the Orient. Although it is necessary to understand our own Western civilization, with the growth in international trade, transport, and communications, every college student needs some awareness of the cultures which surround and impinge upon his own. Many community colleges now have Asian students as well as students from the Islamic nations, from modern Africa and Latin America. Understanding their cultural bases would help understand them as they become a part of the American society. In several generations "our" American heritage will be theirs. The world is opening up through the jet and the communications eye and ear.

At this point I should like to make what seems to be a personal digression, because it is, upon a related topic. While we are thinking and talking about global interdependence, the physical, the biological and social sciences, the humanities, history, and arts and their importance, I am wondering whatever in these times became of the universal teaching of some really basic global conceptions in what used to be called geography?

There is growing concern from the history sector about the numbers of community college students who seem to have little sense of history or time. What about the students who may know who they are and can cope with that but who have little notion of where they are in terms of place? How can you think about Greek history and literature if you don't know where Greece is on the globe? If you can't read a road or wall map, how can you understand satellite mapping? This is remote sensing, of course, compared with possibly not knowing in which direction Chicago is! An important part of the student's general education ought, it seems to me, to include where he is standing on this earth with relationship to short or long distances from him. I'm for including in the coping area a knowledge of place, which in my own limited general education meant that you studied geography. You knew, for example, where and how steel was made and what the implications were for iron and coal workers in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, or Pennsylvania. You learned the relationship of your place on the planet to economics, history, the relationship of physical features like soil and water to the way social patterns developed. I'm for geography and for the seeing and observing skills which accompany its field work. The jet has opened up new worlds of transportation, but we do not always travel above the clouds in a jet. We must also look observantly at the earth on which we walk.

Structure

If there is a commitment to general education, there must be some kind of structure so that learning can take place in an atmosphere of order.

Students should know what course work is expected of them, the objectives of instruction, and how the student will meet expected standards. Standards of mastery are essential in order to make a degree meaningful. Much of the revolt against the present state of affairs in general education is against the structureless chaos of what Boyer calls "the curriculum cafeteria."

We have already discussed areas of emphasis and their interdisciplinary nature. The general education curriculum could be seen as a synthesis of these two thrusts -- the thinking, communication, coping skills taught in and applied to interdisciplinary studies by teams or groups of people who could illustrate the synthesis and interrelationships of knowledge. All instructors would be instructors of thinking, communication, coping. On the team in each area of study would be a writing/reading teacher who would work with students on how to read and write in that content area. Teachers would include instructional technologists and media specialists and librarians in their planning and deliberation so that the college's resources could be organized and brought to bear on the content. Instructors in the vocational areas would include the skill teaching in their subject/content and they too would work with a writing/reading teacher so that students could get communication practice in those content areas. Electives would be taken from the interdisciplinary areas. The role of administration and staff would be to make it possible to achieve the instructional objectives.

Content-Related Tools of Technology

There is so much to know as subject matter, someone has pointed out, that colleges cannot teach everything they would like to. A part of general education becomes, then, a knowledge of the methods of acquiring information from the multiple resources in the environment, so that learning becomes a continuing and life-long process. Everyone should know how to use books, reference works, and a library as a resource. Technology is mechanizing libraries and this too must be understood. In a technological society, all the tools that serve the methodologies are an important part of general education, both in terms of understanding their uses and their limits. The sophistication of the tools of the sciences and communication increases so rapidly that there is little doubt about their growing use in the future. People have accepted the notion that we learn to use the telephone as an extension of our voices or ears, and the typewriter as a kind of universal extension of our hands. It seems natural to accept the idea that everyone ought to learn something about the use of computers as a kind of extension of his head, either in information or computation systems or as a tool of research, inquiry and creativity, not only in science and medicine or business but in the social studies, humanities, and every area of human endeavor -- including the arts. Computer art illustrates well the creative synthesis of past and present. The same old basic principles of form, line, design and relationships of elements prevail, but the medium is new and different. I am advocating a form of computer literacy as an important underlying working component in general education.

The tools of most modern walks of endeavor also include powerful audio and visual tools with which to communicate in all areas -- the sciences, the health sciences, business and economics, government, the social sciences, the humanities, the arts. Film, magnetic tape, recorders, cameras are commonplace communication devices in a world of electronic news gathering and satellite communication. For the general education of the present, and the future, students need the understanding or the mastery of the principles and purposes of all kinds of electronic equipment with which their society expects them to work, extend their knowledge or skills, or create for their emotional sophisticated satisfaction. The tools of the future are not only intellectual, but interestingly enough the tools of the brain, of the eye, of the intellect and not of the muscle ... which is a commentary on how far from our working origins we have come as we move into the post-industrial society.

The Community College Commitment

From the broader background and some general considerations about the nature of general education and the kinds of issues or questions to which it has addressed itself or could address itself, we go to some more specific elements of the future of general education in the community college. One administrator, with a somewhat wider view than mine, of enrollment trends, E.S.H.'s, and all of the kinds of things with which administrators seem to have to concern themselves these days, when asked the question of how he saw the future of general education in the community college, simply snorted and said, "Easy question. There is no future." This seems to be a somewhat Heilbronerian view, but it does point up the need to consider other significant

matters. Most of my colleagues agreed there should be general education in the thinking/skills sense we have discussed here but they were not optimistic about ways to get the job done.

I would submit first of all, that community colleges need to face squarely -- through internal self examination and through external shared inquiry -- the issues raised by the Carnegie Commission. Given the nature of the community college mission, the nature of the student body, and the present and future conditions, global, national, economic, social, which surround us, how do we see our direction? If we cannot provide a coherent general education, should we "consider eliminating it entirely"? Should we "question the necessity of requiring students to spend the time in college that meeting ineffective general education requirements now frequently demands"? Should we recognize our mission in serving the community as providing learning experiences largely for non-traditional students who have other goals and motivations than the traditional four-year college student we would like to have, and then strive for excellence in performing this service? Can we stand the self-appraisal?

If we have a commitment to a form of general education, which in the case of the community college would include a wide diversity of students, are we willing to be so committed that we can assess ourselves and build an excellent general education program? Are we willing to expend the time, energy and resources to build into current programs including the occupational, some conception of general education for each student in our universal access institutions?

John Gardner once said that "It is no sin to let average as well as brilliant youngsters into college. It <u>is</u> a sin to let any substantial portion

of them -- average or brilliant -- drift through college without effort, without growth and without a goal. That is the real scandal in many institutions."

The Students

Suppose we accept the notion that general education has a future purpose for the community college, who are the people for whom the general education would be planned? Who generally composes the community college population? They are a mixed group. Many of the students are achievers who are highly motivated through their career goals. They may be working adults with strong aptitudes and motivation for academic study which will improve their work prospects. Some are students who are there "just because they want to get an education." They may be from a variety of ethnic groups interested in upward mobility or with career orientations. They may be women -- now returning in larger numbers than men -- who are mature and in search of an education for a job which will provide a second income, in search of self-fulfillment apart from bringing up a family. Some will have limited language skills because they are refugees or immigrants. Some will be from lower socioeconomic levels with the attendant feelings about their college aspirations. Some will be from homes where parents have college degrees but who in spite of their socioeconomic advantage relative to the majority of other students, have about them an aura of school failure that is just as destructive to them personally as to their less favored peers. K. Patricia Cross in 1976, in Accent on Learning, describes some as a group

of new students who are in college because they find themselves in a society with rising educational expectations. "For the majority of students, the motivation for college arises not from the anticipation of the joys of learning or from intellectual curiosity but from the recognition that education is the way to a better job. They are pragmatic and realistic enough to know that the degree per se, not necessarily the knowledge, is the entree to a higher socio-economic status than that of their parents. A problem that neither they nor we have faced squarely is the possible devaluation of the college degree when most people have one. How possible is it to extend elitist privileges -- those valuable because of their scarcity -- to the masses? It looks now as though the emphasis must shift from the value of the credential to the value of the knowledge and skills gained through college." (p. 7)

Anyone of us who taught in the community college more than a decade (we used to call it a junior college) could attest to the dramatic observable change which the research has supported. When I first came to my job, students were largely a white middle-class population of young people who could not go away to school for financial or other reasons; or who were living at home and liked the short commuting distance; or who may have been under-achievers but who still had relatively adequate skills in communication and computation and wanted mostly to transfer to the universities; and who were largely male.

Today we have sitting before us in classrooms a multi-ethnic, multi-age, multi-goal, multi-ability, multi-sex group whose most striking characteristic is their multi-differences. They drop in, drop out, and increasingly come part-time. In some areas they have taken on still another dimension in

being not only all the multi-s listed above but also multi-national with the attendant language problems. With equal access, there is no way of knowing the language level represented by a high school diploma from half way across the world. Perhaps this is only a shade worse than not really knowing the language or computational level represented by an American high school diploma -- but at least we can test in our own language. By and large the foreign student who comes to the community college is not the same kind of well-prepared student who goes to the American university, which has more prestige to begin with. This has nothing to do with the intelligence or the training of the student in his own country. It has something to do with how well he can perform in the American language which he encounters in every classroom. When he enters the open door, he becomes the responsibility of a lot of people.

In this melting pot of student abilities, backgrounds, motivations, goals, what can we arrive at as the basic core of a general education except those kinds of common skills and topics which apply to everyone's life? These are questions which must be answered by discussion, consultation, and application to the problem. If we have, as some educators say, moved from equal access for all, to universal access with emphasis on education for each, we shall be required because of their individual differences to provide more individualized instruction. We will need more proof of competency or mastery. Learning for mastery is a way of holding students to a set of prescribed standards of achievement. It requires planning. It requires clear objectives for the student. It requires evaluation. More than anything, the whole process requires faculty and administrative time, energy, and commitment.

Choice and Prescription

An extension of the characteristics of the student population will be the choice they make. A one-year certificate program with a job at the end leaves little time for the same kinds of approaches to general education as a student might be exposed to in a four-year or even a two-year program. With shifts in the economy, the largest number of students will be part-time and many will never pursue a degree. Where will they fit in a general education context? Among adult learners indicating their learning interests, 48 percent reported any interest in the topics of general education subject courses as against 78 percent reporting interests in vocational subjects. Of the same group 13 percent reported a first choice interest in the general education topics as against 43 percent in vocational topics. (Cross and Valley, 1974) These were bellwethers for general education among adults in 1974, and adults constitute and will continue to constitute an increasing percentage of the community college student population. The greatest increase in students has been in part-time students who in effect choose their own general education if they are not degree-bound. Many are not.

A problem of prescription of general education courses arises with the student's move away from liberal arts to occupationally-oriented goals which affect his/her choices. The student's choices are often not within the control of the college but conditioned by factors outside the college in the economy or in the job market. The prescriptive aspect for the vocational/occupational population is further limited by the requirements from external accrediting agencies upon whom credentialing depends and over which neither

the college nor the student has control. If the student is spending his time and money, he is also spending his life and most students will want to keep this time span within limits which make it possible for him to get a job as soon as possible in a credential-oriented society. It is not so much graduation and a degree that may motivate students as accreditation and credentials. A solution seems to be that if the general education thrust is on thinking and communication, these skills can be negotiated in vocational classes because the skills have strong job relationships to most vocations.

If mastery of occupational subject matter is the end objective, there is often little time for mastery of vocational fundamentals, especially if students must also master basic and computational skills should he have deficiencies in that area. There is even less time for electives or other courses outside the occupational content.

The part-time, in-and-out students who take only what they want and select their own general education may be here today and gone next semester. Sometimes they are here today and gone this semester. Sometimes this is their pattern every semester. Where do they fit into a general education pattern? Again, by stressing thinking and communicating in every class as well as in the subject matter areas. The large percentage who drop out or who do not go on to a baccalaureate degree are also among the group for whom prescription of general education courses per se presents problems.

For some students the present general education curriculums are "holding" patterns in which they take some of the required courses for vocational/occupational programs they are waiting to get into, especially in curricula in which places are restricted. Their choices are conditioned not by their need for continuity in a required general education sequence but by their anticipated occupational needs.

For the non-traditional student -- largely part-time -- not baccalaureate bent, general education now is a matter of personal selection and choice by the student, who takes what he or she wants. There is thus no continuity of general education course work -- hence, there arises a problem of how should general education be planned? We are seeing four-year institutions going from the age of permissiveness in the 60's to more structure in the 70's. But among the vast majority of non-vocational community college students who are part-time and non-degree oriented, course requirements will not necessarily mean students are course takers or choosers. How can the community college solve the problem of combining course-taking with course requirements?

If involvement is the key to persistence for a degree, and the community college students are not as involved as four-year students and therefore less persistent, perhaps we should recognize that while it may be a given right to have an opportunity for education, there is no God-given right that says anyone needs to have a degree unless he wants to persist. This is his choice. According to Labor Department studies, a college education will not be needed for the vast majority of the forty-six million jobs that will open up between 1976-1986. College courses for adults who come for the sake of learning may increase, as may general education takers if the college can offer experiences and a kind of involvement which the outside world cannot.

Guidance in making choices is a college responsibility. It is folly to assume that the vocation for which we prepare the student now will be the same thing he will be doing ten years from now. Change is inevitable in the state of human affairs and we shall hope to have taught ways of coping

with change. We would assume that adjustment and adaptability come with learning to cope with change. However, the student will still need to be a person capable of clear and reflective thinking, communicating, solving problems, analyzing, synthesizing in whatever work he or she may be doing. Industry training programs and manuals on advice to executives and managers of all kinds, whether industrial, scientific, educational, urge a period of time set aside expressly to engage deliberately in such thought processes, to reflect, and to bring these mental processes to bear upon the content of their work. If general education stresses thinking skills, it will follow that general education will be part of the necessary background for any job.

It has been well-known for a long time that personal characteristics and inter-personal skills are, in the long run, much stronger factors in worker performance or failure-to-perform than is vocational know-how. A general education which includes coping with the rest of one's fellow human beings, or coping with stress, is a better general background than the performance of some kinds of specific tasks which can subsequently be learned on the job.

Other Voices

Competition for students is increasingly keener not only in public and private sectors of higher education but through agencies of all kinds -- the military educates; industry trains; crafts and trades train; government gives on-the-job learning opportunities; there are myriads of special private trade and training institutions. People learn in many more ways than from school alone.

Perhaps we should examine more closely and honestly what is happening as an increasing numbers of our students are shifting to more vocational/ educational programs. Is the old view of a comprehensive college realistic in terms of what we are willing to afford?

We are not without analytical critics. John Astin, in his book Four Critical Years, (1977) points out that community college students are not only diverse in age and capabilities, but they are different from traditional students in their attitudes. They expect less, which means their expectations have a negative influence on persistence, so many drop out or transfer. They commute or have jobs so they don't participate in extra-curricular activities, are seldom on campus except for classes, and interact infrequently with faculty and fellow students. Uninvolved students have poorer chances of persisting and of implementing career plans. Because a large proportion of community college students do not get degrees, the cost of the community college per degree recipient may in certain instances be more expensive than in the four-year institution. (p. 284) But what are the alternatives? One college president was recently quoted as saying, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." If we are committed to education for the whole population, we must be prepared to pay the cost. The cost to the community college student who is also a taxpayer may well be one of the student's problems to which he may apply his skills of analysis in practical economics or politics!

Wonderland Revisited

Given the restrictiveness of occupation/vocational curricula, the nature of the non-traditional students, many with poor preparation in communication and computational skills, the job market, and the multi-social factors bearing upon economic considerations, the nature of the national and world-wide problems which affect all of us, let us assume we decide to implement a general education program in a community college. We shall construct a modest model called Wonderland Community College.

We shall also assume that there is a common body of processes, skills, and goals involved in learning and living, no matter who or where the person is. To think clearly and effectively. To communicate. To cope. To appreciate. Suppose we call the cultivation of these abilities the core, for the moment, of general education. Wonderland Community College is no longer known as a two-year college because that would be an anachronism when degrees are earned in less or more time. The community of people who live and work at WCC consult to conceive of a number of possibilities for general education. They discover that for degree-oriented students, a core of requirements can be built around the mastery of the thinking skills and the enhancement of these abilities as they are used in application to basic subject matters in the sciences, social sciences, humanities, the arts, etc. This is because they are all basic subject matters necessary to deal with personal problem-solving and solving problems in the various worlds of the environment which touch upon the student as a person and a citizen of an enlarging community. The learning objectives

are clearly stated. Learning and teaching are related to the kinds of experiences in the classroom or outside in the community which would achieve the objectives. At the end of a period of time, when a student has shown mastery of the skills and the content of the program up to the standard required, he or she gives evidence that he/she can synthesize all of the elements into a whole pattern. It is believed that if the aim of general education is to counter fragmentation or narrow vocationalism, then some evidence of synthesis is necessary to achieve this goal. This is done in a number of ways. Examples are a final-year paper read by a team of faculty members, in a test, or a multi-faculty seminar built around agreed-upon criteria.

Teachers teach on interdisciplinary teams through which the subject matter is presented in such ways that the students will be able to see relationships between subjects, skills, and their personal goals as they proceed in their studies. Hence mastery of synthesis is a familiar process in their education. The teaching is centered around meaningful questions. Content and methodologies support each other. The final synthesis project thus comes easily to students.

For vocational-occupational students, who need to master this same set of processes, skills and goals, subjects in addition to their required work are chosen from the body of general educational course or subject work available to all degree-oriented students. Teacher teams work cooperatively in an interdisciplinary fashion. Primarily, the skills and processes are incorporated into the teaching of the vocational subjects in much the same way as they are incorporated into the liberal arts. If students need problem-solving, they are asked to solve problems within the context of the

vocational subject. If they need to analyze, they are given practice in analyzing in the content of the vocational subject. If they need to learn to communicate, they are given practice in learning to communicate in or about the content area of the vocational subject. At the time when they will be granted a vocational degree or certificate, they, too, are evaluated for mastery of the synthesis and coping processes. Going into the world of work, they should be able to think, communicate, and work with equal facility.

For the non-degree non-traditional student who comes to take courses, if all courses include the thinking, communication, and problem-solving processes or whatever the process components are, he or she, too, will have also acquired some general education.

Many non-traditional students are unprepared in basic communication skills and mathematics. At WCC they do not go off into a how-to-do it course in writing or reading or computing which seems to bear little relationship to whatever else they are studying, a course to "get through" because it is required. At Wonderland Community College it makes much more sense to do not only what Harvard is doing, but what some community college programs are moving toward -- namely to have someone who can teach the skill of writing, or special kinds of reading, work as part of a team of people in a content area and practice those skills of reading and writing with the student by applying them to the subjects he is expected to master in the content area. The teacher of math skills is part of a science or vocational team. This means a radical shift in departmental traditions. It means changes in teacher attitudes about learning and their role in learning. But given willing minds and good hearts, nothing is impossible for teachers who believe that student learning is their raison d'etre.

Each teacher by adjusting course work and teaching strategies around the general education of the student is a teacher of reading and writing, just as each science or vocational teacher is a teacher of mathematics. WCC teachers know that it is hopeless for non-traditional, or traditional, students to be told by content/subject matter teachers that the students do not read or write well when the teachers do not ask them to write or when teachers spend all of their time talking and telling the student what is in the book anyway. WCC teachers think it defies common sense or logic to have such expectations. It is just as illogical as assuming that students are not capable of mastering the methodology of scientific inquiry when lab and other exercises do not give them a chance to practice the method.

For those students who are weakest in skill areas a special program for non-traditional students is available. Since all teachers are teachers of reading and writing for all students, the special program has special writing teachers for this group. They work with content area teachers. But the students in the lowest level of communication achievement come to a program where they practice the thinking and communication skills more intensively with kind, supportive teachers. The design is based on the findings of people who have looked at many of these programs. The basic principles around which the programs were originally built are those outlined by Roueche and Kirk (1973). The most important are that the community college has a commitment to achieve the goal of serving all students in the community and that only instructors who volunteer to teach nontraditional students should ever be involved. (p. 82)

At WCC the total learning resources of the college are utilized -- materials of all kinds, as well as places like the learning labs and library. The content area teachers work with the resource personnel to make the program work. Teaching strategies are devised to fit the course work and student population.

At WCC the atmosphere is orderly and structured, demanding but caring. This is, of course, because WCC teachers are themselves models of general education in practice. They recognize that when they are dealing with the non-traditional student, they are also dealing with students more difficult to teach because of their diversity in abilities and needs. If teachers are generally educated, they can use their own problem-solving abilities to solve such problems. Like Alice's friends some may be ducks and some eaglets -- surely none are dodos -- and in Wonderland the test of a teacher's own creativity, imagination, or coping skills is thought to be greater and more prestigious with the non-traditional student than with the bright baccalaureate.

At WCC people are as committed as they say they are to general education whose threatened passing they had lamented with their tears. They had swum awhile in ideas before paddling to the shore where they consulted about implementation. In order to deal with the issues, they thought clearly and effectively. They analyzed. They engaged in problem-solving with the help of their creative imaginations in finding alternatives. They communicated clearly and effectively. They coped with themselves, their interrelationships, the stresses of conferring with one another, and ultimately with the students. Having done all this, <u>they proved</u> that general education for all is possible with universal access to education. They showed mastery of the purpose, content and format of general education for the present and future.

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